

Bureau of Land Management
Northeast California Resource Advisory Council

Field Tour and Meeting
June 2-3, 2010
Alturas, California

June 2

Members toured the South Fork Grazing Allotment to review juniper reduction work. The tour also included Likely Mountain and Pine Creek Reservoir.

June 3

Attendance

Category one: Todd Swickard, John Erquiaga, Skip Willmore, Ken McGarva. Absent: Jack Razzeto.

Category two: Martin Balding, Alan Cain, Gale Dupree, Frank Bayham. Absent: Rosalee Bradley.

Category three: Sean Curtis, Nancy Huffman, Jim Chapman, Norvie Enns. Absent: Pete Neely.

There is a quorum.

Guests: Chrystie Davis, Placerville; Cece Dale-Cesmat, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Susanville.

BLM Staff: District Manager Nancy Haug, Alturas Field Manager Tim Burke, Eagle Lake Associate Field Manager Dennis Benson, Surprise Field Manager Shane DeForest, District Public Affairs Officer Jeff Fontana.

Opening Business

The agenda was approved as presented. The minutes from the February meeting were approved.

State Director's Report

District Manager Nancy Haug presented the report on behalf of Acting State Director Jim Abbott. She conveyed his thanks to RAC members for their service. Highlights:

National/State Issues:

- **New Leadership** – We're well into this Administration and all our key positions in Washington are now filled. Until a new State Director is chosen, Jim Abbott will serve as Acting State Director.
- **2010 Budget** – We're more than halfway through Fiscal Year 2010 and of course already thinking about 2011. The President's budget is out and looks good for BLM. President Obama has proposed \$1.1 billion for BLM in FY 2011, an \$8 million increase over last year. It's possible that we won't have an approved budget and we'll be under a "Continuing Resolution" for the rest of this year.
- **Legislation** – We are now in last few months of the 111th Congress. As for pending legislation, we have about half a dozen proposals – including two in Northern California, Stornetta on the Coast and Chappie-Shasta near Redding.
- **State Priorities:** Our statewide priorities are in tune with the National priorities: 1) renewable energy, 2) the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, 3) Youth initiatives; and 3) the 10th Anniversary of the National Landscape Conservation System.
- **Renewables:** Statewide, we have more than 150 solar and wind applications covering more than a million acres, most of that in the Desert. Here in NorCal, we have about 20 applications for wind projects, 15 in the wind testing stages and 5 in the development stages. The public will be involved at every step.
- **ARRA or the Recovery Act or Stimulus** –BLM-California received \$40 million to fund 115 projects on public lands in California. Most contracts have been let at this point, all with the goal of creating or augmenting jobs by putting boots on the ground. These investments will restore landscapes and habitat, spur renewable energy development remediate abandoned mine lands; and build roads, bridges and trails.
- **The National Landscape Conservation System** is celebrating its 10th Anniversary in 2010. Here in the Northeast, you have a number of Wilderness Study Areas in the System. Statewide, California has more units within the System than any other State.
- **Youth in the Great Outdoors** – Secretary Salazar is very committed to connecting our young people with the outdoors. This includes not only environmental education, but hiring youth to work on public lands and with Interior offices and personnel. His new "Youth in the Great Outdoors" unveiled recently sets goals for this effort.

District Manager's Report

Nancy noted:

- Eagle Lake Field Manager Dayne Barron will be departing to take the district manager's position in Medford. Ken Collum will be acting field manager in August and September. The search has begun for a new Eagle Lake Field Manager.
- ARRA projects are underway and pending, with most scheduled for completion by the end of 2010.
- Several events will celebrate the 10th anniversary of the National Landscape Conservation System. All RAC members are invited.

Sage Steppe Restoration Strategy

Council members discussed their observations on the field tour to the South Fork Livestock Grazing allotment, including the juniper reduction projects they observed.

Tim Burke led the discussion about implementing juniper reduction projects. Specific to grazing, Tim noted that the Sage Steppe Ecosystem Restoration Management Strategy calls for two years of rest from grazing after juniper reduction treatments to allow for reestablishment of sage steppe vegetation, recovery of grasses and recovery of habitat for special status species such as sage grouse.

The RAC discussed the two years' rest requirement. Based on the field tour, John Erquiaga suggested that the two years' rest rule should not be absolute. Martin agreed with John's assertion that livestock should be allowed in to areas sooner if recovery is progressing well. Nancy Huffman noted that duration of grazing could have an impact when grazing resumes. Skip Willmore noted that the permittees are best qualified to determine conditions of allotments and should be trusted to decide when to allow livestock back in to treated areas.

Tim reminded the RAC that there are some public opinions that the strategy was developed just to increase livestock grazing, even though the strategy is designed to improve landscape health. He said a decision to allow early grazing could appear to verify those concerns. Frank Bayham said the project will be a model and closely watched; the BLM should take a conservative approach and follow the management plan guidelines when allowing grazing to resume. The rest period should be observed.

Tim said that if the rest period is waived the BLM would need to clearly demonstrate that natural resource recovery objectives are being met.

Ken McGarva suggested that projects should be large enough to ensure good results.

Martin suggested that the permittee on the site visited yesterday should be allowed to graze livestock now, even though the two year rest period has not expired. Nancy agreed, suggesting that results and impacts should be closely monitored.

Shane DeForest observed that there was a substantial amount of cheat grass on the site (a condition that BLM seeks to avoid). Gale agreed. The weed situation should be closely monitored and a plan developed to deal with the weed issue at that site.

Todd Swickard said decisions should be made on a site specific basis. He said the juniper reduction project is a rare opportunity to improve range condition and a conservative approach should be taken when deciding when to allow resumption of grazing. John agreed.

RAC Consensus: There is a consensus that the BLM should closely monitor the South Fork Allotment, provide for grazing rest this growing season allow grazing earlier than the two year rest requirement, perhaps next year, if conditions warrant. BLM should closely the three specific sites in the allotment closely to compare current conditions with resource conditions in the coming years. The RAC agrees that the main consideration should be recovery of the sage steppe vegetation in accordance with the objectives in the Sage Steppe Restoration Management Strategy. The BLM will report progress to the RAC.

The council discussed recommendations developed by the Sage Steppe Subcommittee. Notes from the subcommittee meeting follow in italics:

*RAC SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING
INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION IN SAGE STEPPE RESTORATION
May 7, 2010*

PURPOSE

- *ENCOURAGING INTERAGENCY COOPERATION*
- *PRIORITIZING COOPERATIVE PROJECTS*
- *PRIVATE LAND OWNER AWARENESS*

AGENDA

- 1) *REVIEW STATUS AND REQUIREMENTS OF SAGE STEPPE STRATEGY*
- 2) *REVIEW COLLABORATIVE FOREST LANDSCAPE RESTORATION INITIATIV*

3) DISCUSSION AND DEVELOPMENT OF RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RAC

ATTENDEES

Nancy Huffman (RAC Chairperson), Jack Razzeto (RAC), Gale Dupree (RAC), Norvie Enns (RAC), Sean Curtis (RAC/Modoc County), Mary Florez (Modoc NF), Jessica Humes (Alturas NRCS), Jeff Fontana (Norcal BLM), Dereck Wilson (Eagle Lake BLM), Garth Jeffers (Surprise BLM), Alan Uchida (Alturas BLM), Marti Butow (Alturas BLM), Tim Burke (Alturas BLM)

The meeting started with a discussion of interagency coordination. Aside from the BLM, USFS and the Counties, agencies to be coordinated with include NRCS, Fire Safe Councils and Cooperative Sage Steppe Restoration Initiative

CalFire has moved out of the prescribed fire realm and are not so much a player anymore.

Nancy suggested that one of the purposes for the meeting might be to identify obstacles to interagency coordination. Using this approach we should be better able to identify potential solutions.

Tim began by reviewing the Sage Steppe Restoration Strategy Objectives:

-USFS and BLM are to treat a cumulative 14,000-21,000 acres per year

-The mixture of treatment types is to be approximately 56% fire, 41% mechanical and 3% hand treatments.

In 2009, a total of 7,292 USFS and BLM acres were treated. The treatment mixture was 37% fire, 10% mechanical and 53% hand treatment. Surprise Field Office was responsible for about 69% of the hand treatment acreage.

The RAC noted that market access is a key factor driving treatment mixtures. The haul distance to biomass plants makes mechanical treatments less economical in the Surprise Field Office. Also, fire is trickier to utilize in Nevada. As a result, you get a lot of hand treatments.

The group discussed the availability of grants such as the USFS Woody Biomass Grant. Sean mentioned the Rural Energy Assistance Program and its potential to help finance portable pellet mills.

The take away message from the discussion is that:

Markets developed by counties will help to focus interagency coordination

Sage steppe Restoration Strategy EIS project design standards include:

-Post treatment rest from livestock grazing until recovery of desirable vegetation is achieved. This is generally found to be a two growing season rest period. Pretreatment rest is required for prescribed burn projects.

-Preservation of old growth juniper (>150 years old)

The RAC noted that removal of young juniper around old growth may lead to increased blow-down loss.

-No new permanent roads built exclusively to access juniper.

-Modification of archaeological evaluation protocol standards as indicated.

-Monitoring and Adjustment. This is the key design standard also known as adaptive management.

Minimum monitoring requirements are identified in the Sage Steppe Restoration EIS and in the subsequent Sage Steppe Ecosystem Restoration Strategy Vegetation Monitoring Protocols. These include:

-Development of a pre-treatment Monitoring Plan to be included for public review in the NEPA documentation. The Monitoring Plan will include:

•Base Data

Project Name
Acreage Treated
Treatment Type
Treatment Dates

•Noxious Weeds

Pre and post-treatment ocular inventory to include species and location

•Old Growth Retention

Ocular inventory of the number of old growth harvested, killed or severely damaged

•Dense Juniper Retention

Pre and post treatment mapping of acreage with >20% juniper canopy cover. The percentage of dense juniper retained is to be reported.

•Vegetation Composition

Pre-treatment identification of desired future condition
Pre and post-treatment photos, line intercept transects and density plots
Monitoring to be conducted in the years 2, 5, 10 & 15 post treatment

•Additional Data to be Collected as Needed

*Elevation/precipitation at project site
Pre/Post Treatment spring flow data (water levels in reservoirs)
Bone dry weight of biomass removed (actual or estimated)
Archaeological monitoring information*

Nancy noted that the agencies should initially be conservative in their identification of desired future conditions.

Dereck mentioned that state and transition modeling would be useful for identification of future conditions.

Rick Miller at Oregon State is currently working on developing a model for estimation of bone dry biomass on a site. At the present time it's looking like 30% young juniper canopy cover translates to about 30,000 bone dry tons per acre or 15 tons. This is very similar to the bone dry ton weights we were recording at Sage Hen Summit. Similarly 20% canopy translates to 20,000 lbs./acre and 40% canopy translates to 40,000 lbs./acre.

Relative to the project monitoring requirements identified above, Tim said that he had funding available to contract development of a Sage Steppe Restoration Information Platform. He envisions the contract including the following components:

-Sage Steppe Restoration Platform

- Data Standards*
- GIS and Database Integration*
- Data Input Forms*
- Format for Annual Report to Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)*
- Format for TAC Report to Public*
- Annual Monitoring Schedule*
- Inclusion of Private Land Data*

-Priority Project Map

- Identify Potential Collaborative Projects*

-Documents and Displays to Communicate Restoration Accomplishments and Issues to the Public

Mary Florez mentioned that we should utilize existing databases and frameworks to reduce data input requirements. She said we should not attempt to reinvent the wheel.

It is important to keep private land data segregated but then have mechanisms to combine public and private data on an as needed basis.

University of California Cooperative Extension was mentioned as a likely source of database expertise.

At this point in the meeting, Mary, a biologist with the Modoc National Forest presented a powerpoint on the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative This initiative has

funding available for landscape level restoration partnerships such as the Sage Steppe Restoration Strategy. The Modoc NF has submitted an application and significant additional funding to support implementation of the Strategy may be available in 2011 and beyond.

Jessica Humes, Range Management Specialist with the Alturas NRCS, pointed out that her office is also receiving significant funding (\$17 million over 5 years for the Western States with about \$5 million available locally) to support restoration of sage-grouse habitat. This funding could be used to support sage steppe restoration on both public and private land.

Jessica discussed the NRCS interpretation of NEPA. The opportunity for public scoping occurs when the Farm Bill is debated in Congress. The NEPA documentation for implementation of specific projects is limited to an internal checklist that is generally not available for public review.

The remaining component of Sage Steppe Restoration Strategy Implementation is establishment of the TAC. Due to Federal Advisory Committee Act issues it has been determined that it may be more feasible to have a non-federal agency coordinate the TAC. Mark Steffek of the North Cal-Neva Resource Conservation and Development Council has agreed to take on that responsibility.

Technical Advisory Committee Roles and Responsibilities

- Review Monitoring Data Annually
- Conduct Annual Public Meetings to Present Findings and Receive Input
- Make Recommendations for Programmatic and Site Specific Adjustments

The Subcommittee recommends that

1) The TAC should consist of an odd number of members including:

- 1 BLM or USFS Grazing Permittee*
- 1 Wood Products or Energy Industry Representative*
- 1 Environmental Representative*
- 1 Member of Academia involved in natural resources*
- 1 County Representative*

The Subcommittee feels that it is important to ensure that travel and meal expenses of TAC members are covered.

Overall, the Subcommittee feels that the agencies are moving towards improved cooperation and coordination. This is best exemplified in development of the sage steppe restoration database, the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative and the NRCS sage-grouse habitat restoration project.

The Subcommittee further recommends that:

2) The Sage Steppe Ecosystem Restoration partners including the BLM, USFS, NRCS, Counties and Fire Safe Councils develop and sign an MOU on Cooperative Implementation and Monitoring of the Sage Steppe Ecosystem Restoration Strategy by 9/30/2010.

- 3) *The BLM prioritize implementation of at least one cooperative Sage Steppe Restoration project (crossing jurisdictional boundaries) with the USFS by 2013.*
- 4) *The BLM and the USFS work to include data from NRCS project in the Sage Steppe Restoration database (ongoing).*
- 5) *The BLM research whether Collaborative Forest Landscape Initiative funding is available for use on BLM managed land.*
- 6) *The BLM field offices have adopted Supplemental Procedures to the State Protocol Agreements for Sage Steppe Restoration. The BLM should work with the USFS to explore similar procedures to encourage interagency cooperation.*

--Subcommittee notes compiled by Tim Burke 5/16/10

Council Comments/Recommendations:

Jim Chapman recommended that the BLM and Forest Service need to maximize use of funding from various sources to make the most progress toward the same resource goals.

Sean Curtis said a streamlined process involving all partners will be needed to ensure that all required monitoring is completed and data recorded. He added that more discussion is needed on the grassbanking concept – providing grazing allotments for permittee use when areas are rested from livestock grazing after sage steppe restoration treatments. He suggested a future RAC agenda topic. He said there should be a permanent supply of temporary forage. It would always be available for use by various permittees affected by rest requirements associated with juniper treatments.

Cece suggested that all involved agencies meet annually to plan projects and the best use of available funds from all sources.

Cece also presented information on the NRCS process for juniper treatments on private lands. (attachment).

Martin Balding expressed concern that juniper treatments be done according to standards for resource impacts and visual appearance. He expressed concern that projects leaving landscapes denuded are visually unattractive and have negative impacts on other natural resources.

The council discussed the recommended membership in the technical advisory committee to be sponsored by the North Cal Neva Resource Conservation and Development Council (in subcommittee notes above).

*Recommendation: The RAC accepted the report and recommendations (included above) developed by the subcommittee and forwarded them to the BLM for consideration.
Specifically:*

1) The technical advisory committee should consist of an odd number of members including:

- 1 BLM or USFS Grazing Permittee*
- 1 Wood Products or Energy Industry Representative*
- 1 Environmental Representative*

- 1 Member of Academia involved in natural resources*
- 1 County Representative*

The Subcommittee feels that it is important to ensure that travel and meal expenses of TAC members are covered.

Overall, the Subcommittee feels that the agencies are moving towards improved cooperation and coordination. This is best exemplified in development of the sage steppe restoration database, the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative and the NRCS sage-grouse habitat restoration project.

The Subcommittee further recommends that:

- 2) The Sage Steppe Ecosystem Restoration partners including the BLM, USFS, NRCS, Counties and Fire Safe Councils develop and sign an MOU on Cooperative Implementation and Monitoring of the Sage Steppe Ecosystem Restoration Strategy by 9/30/2010.*
- 3) The BLM prioritize implementation of at least one cooperative Sage Steppe Restoration project (crossing jurisdictional boundaries) with the USFS by 2013.*
- 4) The BLM and the USFS work to include data from NRCS project in the Sage Steppe Restoration database (ongoing).*
- 5) The BLM research whether Collaborative Forest Landscape Initiative funding is available for use on BLM managed land.*
- 6) The BLM field offices have adopted Supplemental Procedures to the State Protocol Agreements for Sage Steppe Restoration. The BLM should work with the USFS to explore similar procedures to encourage interagency cooperation.*

Modoc National Wild Horse Herd Territory

Tim Burke discussed BLM coordination with the Modoc National Forest on gathering excess horses. A gather proposed for summer in the Devil's Garden herd territory has been postponed. The forest has completed a wild horse inventory for the territory in the northwest edge of the forest. BLM's Red Rock Lakes Herd Management Area neighbors it on the west. The Alturas Field Office Resource Management Plan calls for managing the HMA with 16 to 24 animals, in concurrence with a request from the Klamath Tribes, who view the animals as culturally significant. Animals are feed trapped when they move onto private land during winter.

The Modoc NF has asked BLM to gather wild horses that might have moved from the BLM HMA onto Forest lands that are not part of a designated herd territory and therefore not protected by the Wild Horse and Burro Act.

Public Comment

- Skip Willmore asked about camping requirements on BLM managed public lands. Nancy Haug noted that BLM lands are generally open to dispersed camping.
- Chrystie Davis had several wild horse and burro management questions: Will there be public viewing during the Twin Peaks gather? Nancy said all will be allowed.
- Sean Curtis asked for more information on NLCS, including proposals to add national monuments to NLCS. He asked whether the managers have been asked for information from the Washington Office or State Office relative to BLM lands managed by this RAC. He expressed distrust of the Secretary's statement that any national monument would be designated only with local involvement.
 - Nancy responded that there have been no requests for information, data or opinions relative to lands under this jurisdiction.
 - Jim Chapman reported that the Lassen County Board of Supervisors have written to the Secretary asking that any process involving designations be open and involve locals. He said there is concern that a monument could be designated from Washington. He said the supervisors support proposed legislation that would prohibit designation of national monuments without the approval of Congress. He said Lassen County is not opposed to monument designation per se, but is opposed to any process that would not include local involvement. He asked that the RAC be kept involved and apprised of information local offices are providing to the Department of the Interior.

Wild Horses and Burros

Jeff Fontana presented information on the BLM's development of a national strategy for implementation of Secretary Ken Salazar's initiative to improve management of the wild horse and burro program. He said the public comment period is open, and that RAC comments are requested.

Nancy Huffman, Sean Curtis, Todd Swickard and Alan Cain will work as a subcommittee to develop recommendations for the full RAC to consider. They will meet June 30 in Susanville.

Twin Peaks Gather

Dennis Benson noted that the Eagle Lake Field Office has proposed removal excess wild horses and burros to get to AML for both horses and burros. It would mean removing approximately ,800 horses and about 200 burros. A population flight would be done in July to confirm populations before actual gather are set. The schedule proposed is Aug. 9 to mid September. Dennis explained the staffing and organizational details that are being worked out to provide for a safe operation good flow of information to the public.

The environmental assessment is available for comments until June 18.

Dennis said the Litchfield Corrals now hold holds about 370 animals. Horses and burros from the Twin Peaks gather would be taken to Litchfield and to the BLM Palomino Valley Corrals for adoption preparation. The corral crew is now working to replace older fencing to improve animal safety and to reduce maintenance.

Frank Bayham and Jim Chapman commented on the large number of horses and burros proposed for roundup. They suggested smaller gathers might be more manageable and pose less risk adding that BLM needs to avoid appearing to be mismanaging the gather.

There was a discussion about the need for transparency in communications and the need for the BLM to fully tell the story about range management and how managing wild horse and burro herds fits into the bigger picture.

There was discussion about the pros and cons of gathering the entire HMA or using smaller gathers in successive years.

Nancy Haug reported that several BLM offices are coordinating on managing northeast California, northwest Nevada and southeast Oregon wild horse herds in a coordinated way. There has been some press coverage about managing the region as a unit, but said it is more accurate to characterize the work as cross jurisdictional coordination. Discussions are in the beginning stages with the focus on coordination.

Field Manager's Reports

Eagle Lake: Dennis Benson distributed a written report covering forestry, fuels, wildlife, fire, recreation, renewable energy, archaeology, ARRA and personnel areas (attachment).

Surprise: Shane DeForest distributed a written report covering range management, wild horses and burros, wildlife, realty, energy and minerals, cultural resources, soil and water, noxious weeds, vegetation, fire and fuels, force account, recreation and the Black Rock-High Rock NCA. There has been a delay in issuance of a record of decision for the Ruby Pipeline. Depending on the decision date, construction could start in July. There are now plans for a work site camp area in the community of Lakeview. There will be heavy traffic on Nevada Highway 34 for six months during construction.

Alturas: Tim Burke distributed a written report covering drought conditions, grazing permit renewals, the sage steppe restoration strategy, Twin Bridges Exchange, the Modoc Line Williams Ranch management, an award for the Alturas LE Ranger, PG&E Stewardship Council and West Valley OHV

Closing Business

The Wild Horse and Burro subcommittee will meet in Susanville on Wednesday, June 30, and the full RAC will meet in Susanville on Friday, July 9. The primary topic will be comments on the BLM wild horse and burro management strategy.

Future agenda topics: Grassbanking proposals, report on what constitute an archaeological site and criteria used to evaluate such sites.